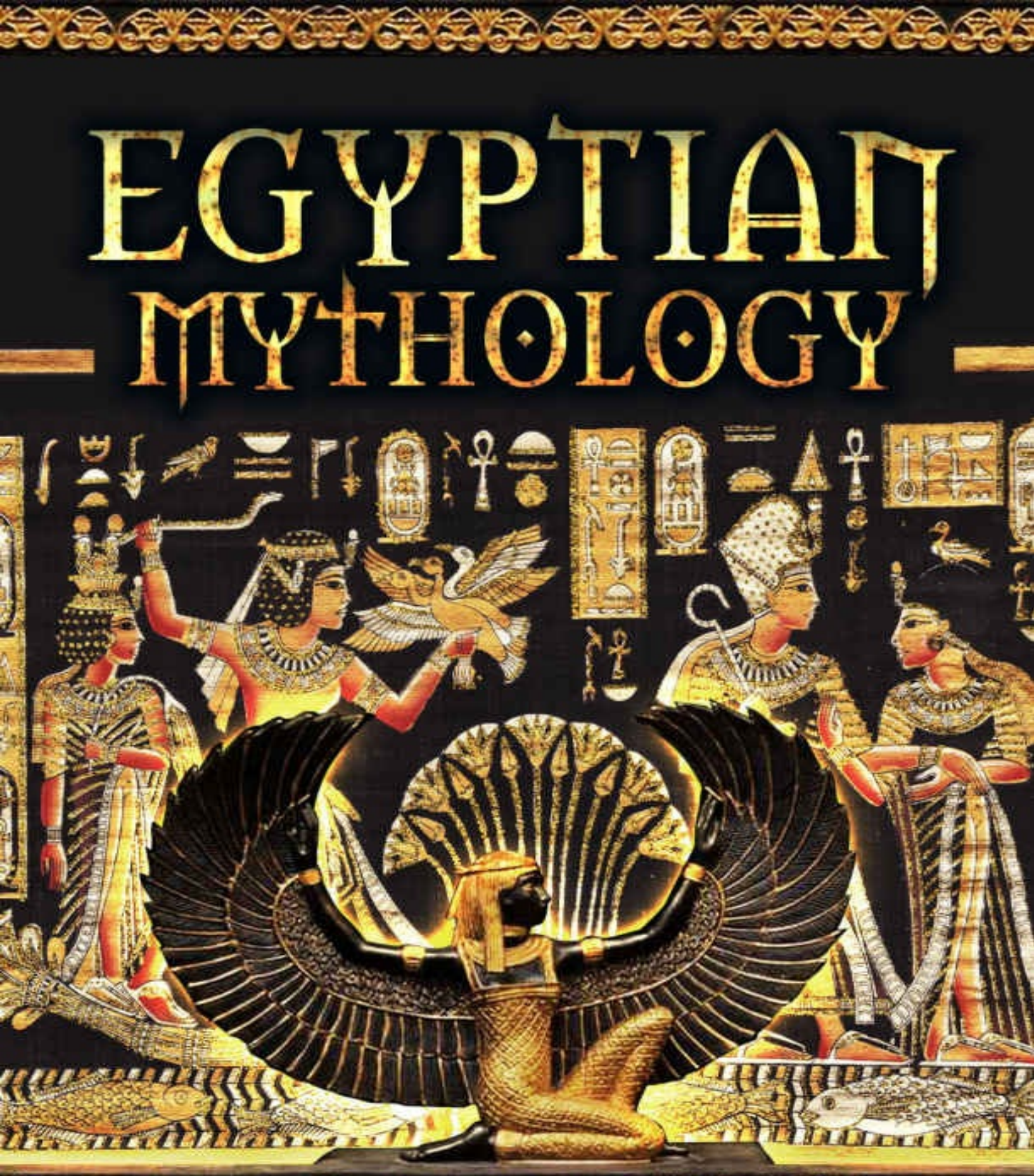
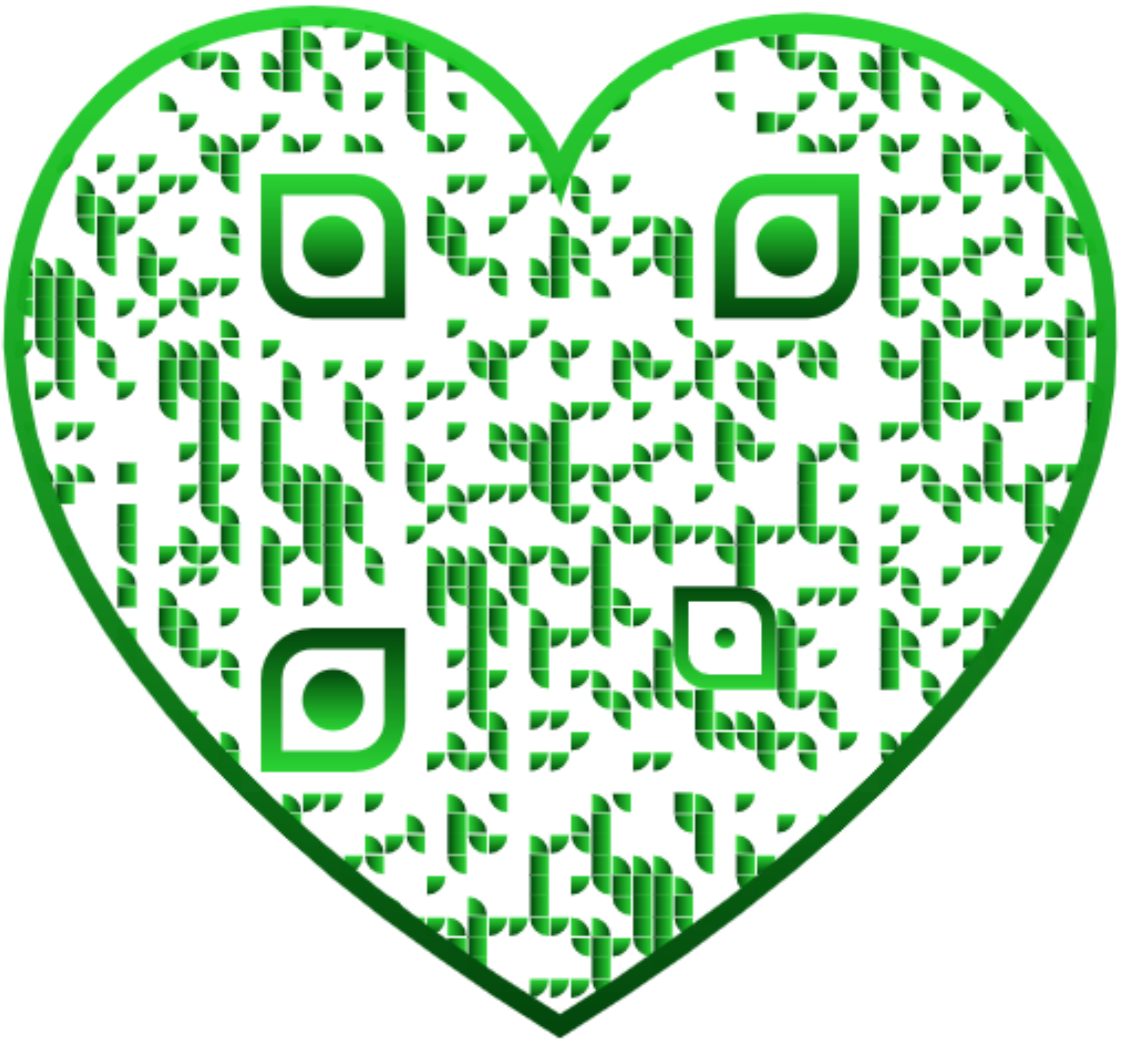
EGYPTIAN MYTHOLOGY



STEPHAN WEAVER



EGYPTIAN MYTHOLOGY

Gods, Pharaohs and Book of the Dead of Egyptian Mythology

BY

Stephan Weaver

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Introduction

Of the many nations in this world, it’s quite apparent that ancient Egypt has a lot of stories to tell. And there is certainly an ample amount of interesting elements in the history of this great nation, but what gives a better insight of ancient Egypt and her incredibly imaginative inhabitants happen to be the myths.

As the epicenter of the ancient Egyptian culture, Egyptian Mythology consists of enthralling gods to whom sacrifices and rituals were consecrated. Isis, Osiris, Ra, and Horus are but a few. Egyptians were able to export their phenomenal religion and culture through their far reaching trade links.

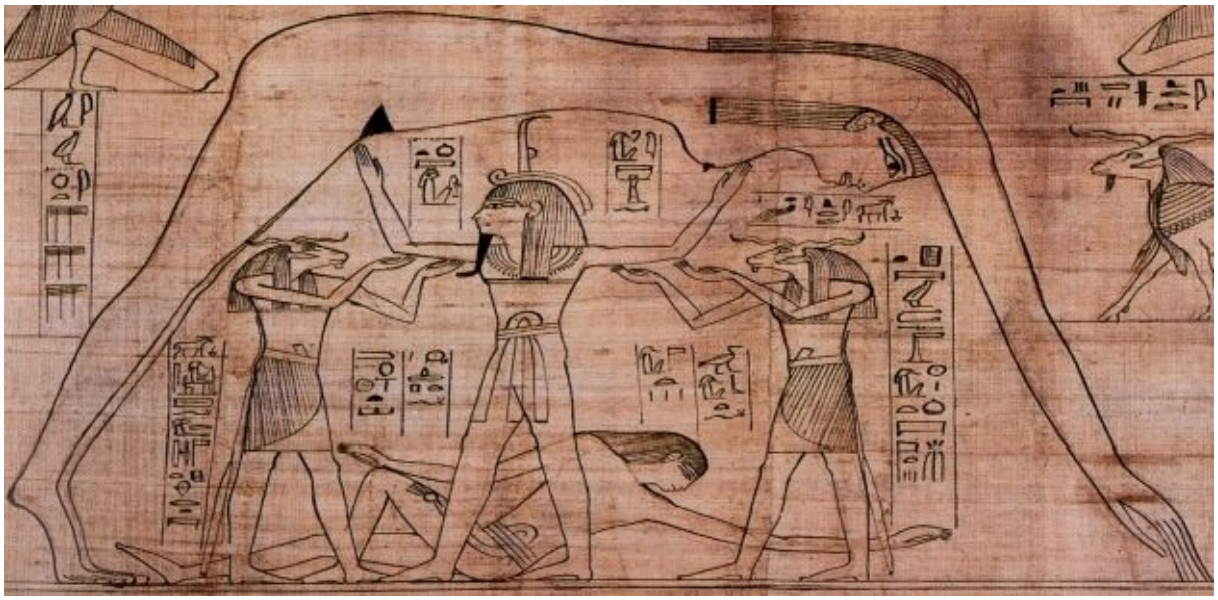
This eBook contains the many features of the mythology which include the deities, the pharaohs, rites and sacrifices and the mysterious “Book of the Dead.” It gives a great insight into the prehistoric Egyptian society.

Near the end of the book there is a bonus chapter full of interesting and fun facts that you would be surprised to learn.

CHAPTER I

Egyptian Mythology

Egyptian Mythology is the accumulation of myths derived from ancient Egypt from at least c. 4000 BCE to 30 CE. The end was marked with the death Cleopatra VII, the last of the Ptolemaic sovereign of Egypt.



The air god Shu, assisted by other gods, holds up Nut, the sky, as Geb, the earth, lies beneath (950 BCE)

Often in Egyptian writing and art, myths occur— particularly in short stories and in religious materials such as ritual texts, hymns, funerary texts and temple decorations. Full accounts of the myth from these sources are rare as they are habitually described in brief fragments.

The Egyptian religion and belief were spread beyond the domain of Egypt through trade, notably after 130 BCE when the Silk Road opened. This made Alexandria the epicenter of commerce. For other cultures, the imperative aspect of Egyptian Mythology was the eternal life after death concept, the reincarnation and benevolent deities. Both Greek philosophers Plato and Pythagoras are believed to be inspired by the belief of Egyptians in reincarnation. What's more, religious cultures from Egypt were largely adopted by the Romans as they did

from other civilization.

Natural surroundings greatly influenced the Egyptian myth. Annually, the Nile flooded the land to renew the soil's richness and promote the prosperity of farming that was essential to the civilization of Egypt. Daily, the sun rose and set to bless the land with light and to watch over the activities of humanity. Thus, in the view of Egyptians, water and the sun were considered the emblems of life. They also viewed time as a chain of natural cycles. Low and high floods threatened the order of this cycle; they caused damage to the cultivation and buildings and brought about famine. The generous Nile valley was encircled by a severe desert that was inhabited by peoples who the Egyptians believed were savage foes who disrupted the order. As a result, they believed their area of habitation was one of stability, secluded from the rest.

To the Egyptians, humanity's existence was believed to be only a tiny part in the journey to eternity. The deities and supernatural agents coordinated and ruled over the course of this voyage.

According to the historian Bunsen:

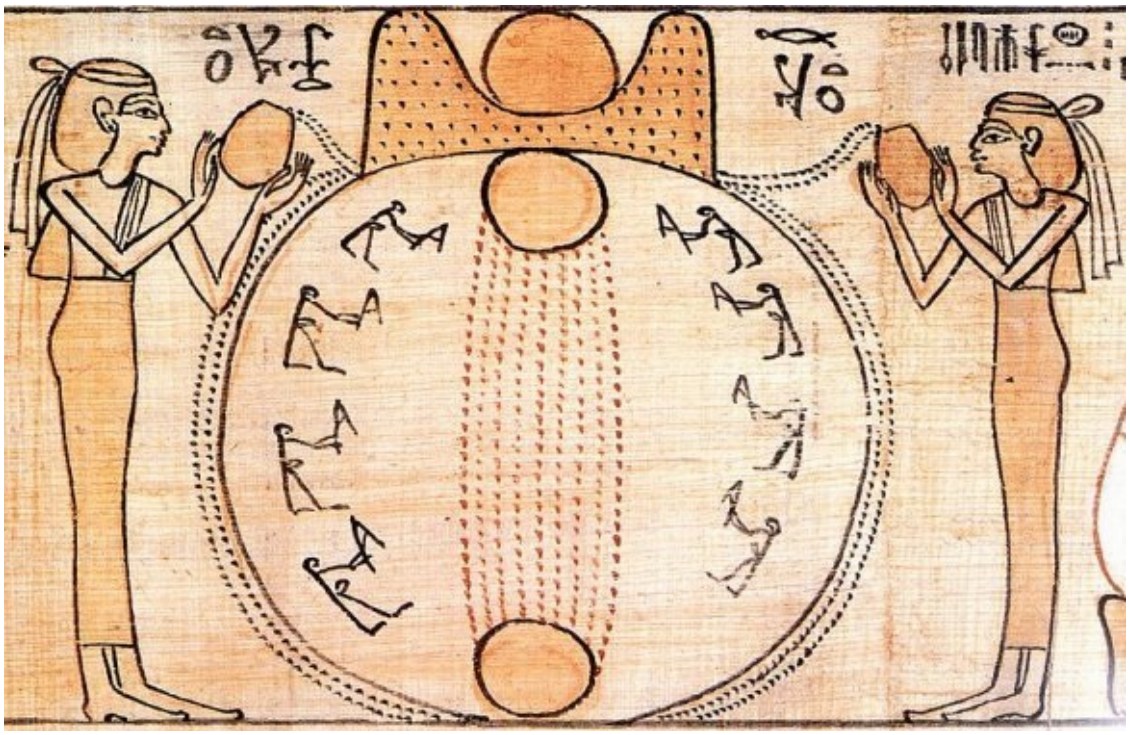
"Heh, called Huh in some eras, was one of the original gods of the Ogdoad [the eight deities worshipped during the Old Kingdom, 2575-2134 BCE] at Hermopolis and represented eternity – the goal and destiny of all human life in Egyptian religious beliefs, a stage of existence in which mortals could attain everlasting bliss (86)."

The existence of someone on this earth was a part of the eternal journey; it was also an introduction to something bigger. The concept of the afterlife for Egyptians was a mirror-world of one's life on earth— particularly, one's life in Egypt. If one desired to enjoy the rest of his/her eternal journey, he was obliged to live that life correctly.

The Creation of the World

The creation of the universe and the world out of whirling chaos and obscurity was where the journey commenced. There was once nothing but infinite dark water, devoid of form or purpose. From this bedlam surfaced Ben-Ben (the primeval hill); atop of this hill lived Atum (sometimes, Ptah). Atum observed the emptiness and realized his loneliness. He bred with his shadow to produce two offspring: Tefnut (goddess of moisture, whom Atum vomited out) and Shu (god of air, whom Atum spat out). The principles of order were issued by Tefnut and the principles of life were given by Shu.

After they were born, the siblings set out to create the world, leaving their father on the Ben-Ben. After a while, Atum was overwhelmed by anxiety as his children took a long time to return. He took out his one eye and sent it to look for them. Much to his relief, Shu and Tefnut returned after some time with his one eye; Atum, grateful for his children’s return, shed tears of happiness. His tears rained atop the dark and fertile soil of Ben-Ben, thereby producing women and men.



The sun rises over the circular mound of creation as goddesses pour out the primeval waters around it (1075–945 BC)

These early beings had no place to dwell, however. Tefnut and Shu, thus, mated and bore the goddess Nut (the Sky) and the god Geb (the earth). The siblings, Geb and Nut, became lovers, inseparable from one another. Unable to accept their unacceptable behavior, Atum took Nut into the heavens, far away from Geb. Both lovers had clear views of one another; however, they were unable to touch. Already impregnated by Geb, Nut gave birth to Set, Osiris, Isis and Nephthys— the prominent Egyptian gods. Osiris was often considered a sensible and thoughtful god which was probably why Atum gave him rule over the world.

Sources

Enjoyable tales and solemn hymns constitute the sources of Egyptian mythology. Illiteracy amongst Egyptians of the time was prevalent, so it was mostly the tradition of storytelling that spread the myths. It is suggested by some that this tradition of storytelling explains why little detail of the myths exist— every Egyptian knew about the myths. Evidence showing the survival of this

oral tradition is precious little and it is pictorial and written sources that furnish the modern knowledge of Egyptian myths. Only few of these sources managed to survive to current times as many of the writings have been lost.

CHAPTER II

Gods and Goddesses

The gods held great leverage over the daily lives of the ancient Egyptian society. They were the creators of the cosmos and the ones that set order. The gods and goddesses had a cult of their own; rituals as well as sacrifices were held for them.

Isis

Isis (Egyptian Aset or Eset) was the eldest daughter of Geb and Nut. She had four siblings, Osiris, Seth, Nephthys and Haroeris. She was both the sibling and wife of Osiris, from whom she bore Horus. Her other offspring were Bastet and probably Ammit.

She was depicted as a beautiful women dressed in a sheath and a headdress that either had a solar disc in between a cow's horn or the hieroglyphic sign of the throne. She would also be depicted as a scorpion, cow or a bird. Her symbols were a sparrow, vulture, sycamore tree, cobra and a small hawk.

Isis depicted with outstretched wings (wall painting, c. 1360 BCE)

Isis was unmatched with her magical powers—not even Osiris or Ra could match her skills; she was the goddess of magic but her prowess was indeed diverse. Isis was the goddess of protection, the patron of nature, the dead,

children, the noble and the commoners. She was loved and worshiped by all social strata. She had a very close link with the kings and kingship. She answered to the entreaty of the slaves, artisans, sinners, the downtrodden, the aristocrats and the maidens.

As a bereaved soul, she was associated with funeral rituals; as a sorceress, she cured the ill and brought the dead back to life and as the ideal mother she was an exemplar of all Egyptian women.

Initially an obscure goddess without temples consecrated to her, she grew famous during the advance of the dynastic age. She became one of the chief deities of ancient Egypt. The cult of Isis spanned across dominions as far distant as the Greco-Roman world, the Roman Empire and Afghanistan.

Isis was the archetype of an ideal wife and mother who was a stout supporter of her husband Osiris. Egyptian women aspired to become the perfect mother and wife she was; she taught them how to weave, brew beer and bake. She was a woman who remained in the background when all was well, but would intervene either with her sorcery or sharp wit when it came to protecting her family during precarious times.

The Story of Isis and Osiris

The chronicles of Isis and Osiris is largely depicted in Plutarch's Greek depiction "*De Iside et Osiride" (*written in the 1st century CE).

According to this literary source, Seth, who was envious of the god of Egypt Osiris, contrived a plan to kill him. He held a banquet and, before his guests, displayed an embellished wooden chest. He asked each of them to fit in it and said that he would reward it to the one who did. The box was custom made for Osiris since Seth had measured him in his sleep. When it came to Osiris's turn,

he fit in the chest perfectly. Seth then closed the led on him and thrust the box into the river Nile meaning for the river to send him as far away as possible. He then was crowned the Pharaoh of Egypt.

Isis wept plentifully over her husband's death. Her tears, it was believed, would induce the flood of the Nile River.

The mourning widow Isis set out to seek his corpse and found it at Byblos, by a tree. She brought back the body to Egypt. Seth had learnt of this so he scavenged for the chest. Once he found it, he hacked Osiris' body into pieces (according to some accounts, fourteen peaces) and scattered his corpse all over Egypt.

The dogged Isis was undeterred by the challenge. With the help of her sister Nephthys, she transformed into a bird and managed to collect each part of the corpse of Osiris. All but one: his genitals. Unfortunately, a fish had feasted on that organ and Isis could not recover it. Nonetheless, she was able to replace it with a golden phallus. She was also able to use her magical prowess to stitch up his body with bandages; he was transformed into a mummy neither dead nor alive. With the help of Thoth's magic she was able to bare him a son, Horus, after nine months. Osiris then became the ruler of the dead after being condemned to the Underworld.

Osiris' demise and reincarnation was revived annually through rituals.

Isis and Her Son Horus

At Khemmis, Isis bore Horus. She fled with her newborn in order to escape the rage of Seth. Horus was endangered by many perils. At one point he was bitten by a poisonous scorpion and Isis had to use her magical skills to heal him. She protected him until he reached the able age to seek vengeance on his father's murderer and claim his throne.

It was for the role she played in guarding her son that she earned the title “Goddess of Protection.”

The Inspiration of Isis on Christianity

The portraits of Isis suckling her newborn Horus served as an inspiration to many Christian paintings of the Virgin Mary with her baby, Jesus Christ.

Horus

Horus (Egyptian, Hor, Har, Her, or Heru) was the Egyptian deity of kingship and sun. He was also depicted as the god of war, hunting, Upper Egypt, light, and protection.

Horus was the posthumous son of Osiris and Isis. Serket (Haroeris) and Hathor were believed to be his consorts.

Depicted as a falcon, Horus had a right eye that was defined as the sun (or morning sun), which symbolized power and epitome. Horus was the archetype of a king and the reigning ruler was often thought to be Horus' manifestation. His right eye was the moon (or evening star), symbolizing the power of healing. This was why he was the God of the Sky.

Papyrus of Ani: The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day (13th century B.C.)

The Battle of Horus with Seth

After his birth, Horus was pursued relentlessly by the murderer of his father, Seth. His mother Isis worked indefatigably to keep him out of harm's way. Once he reached an able age, he set out to avenge the murderer of his father and to lay claim to the throne.

The two had unending battles from the 1st dynasty (*c.* 2925–2775 BCE) onward. Their feud perpetuated for almost a century and was concluded by the triumph of Horus and the merging of Upper and Lower Egypt. Seth was seen as the god of

Lower Egypt, and Horus, the god of Upper Egypt. Horus emerged as a victor - not because of a triumph in the battles but because of his acquisition of the most votes from the other gods. He came to be known as Harsiesis, Heru-ur or Har-Wer– translated as Horus the Great or Horus the Elder. He became the new King of Egypt.

Both warring parties were injured severely. Seth lost his testicles; this explains why the desert he embodies is barren; Seth was the deity that ruled over the desert. Horus, on the other hand, lost his left eye (the moon). It was restored through the magical prowess of Thoth. The eye that was restored was known as “the wedjat eye”; it became a powerful amulet.

Osiris

Osiris (otherwise known as Usir, Asiri, Ausir or Ausar) was the child of Geb and Nut. He was the ruler of the afterlife, the dead and the Underworld. Initially, however, he was the god of the earth. He was the husband of Isis and from her he bore Horus posthumously. Anubis is also believed to be his child.

In his depictions, Osiris is a mummy, with his hands crossed over his chest. In one hand he held a flail and in the other he had a crook. He wore the after-crown which consisted of two ostrich feathers—the crown resembled that of Upper Egypt.

Osiris depicted on the grave of Sennedjem

A yearly ritual to commemorate his death and rebirth would be held. In these festivals processions, sacrifices and nocturnal rites would be held. He was not only believed to be the god that ruled over the dead, but also a god with the power to bestow life from the Underworld (the afterlife), to sprout vegetation and to flood the River Nile.

The deceased kings embodied Osiris, and their children, the living Kings, embodied Horus (the son of Osiris).

Seth

Seth (also known as Setekh, Setesh, or Set) was the god of storms, evil, desert, war and disorder. He was the son of Geb and Nut and his triad of consorts included his sister Nephthys and the foreign goddesses Astarte and Anat.

Seth was the envious sibling of Osiris who he killed to become the King of Egypt. He is represented as a canine body with square-tipped ears, forked tail and a curved, long, projecting stout.

Ra

God of the sun and radiance, Ra (Re or Pra) was a solar deity whose reign extended far and wide. He was the ruler of the earth, sun and the Underworld. Ra is linked with the hawk and falcon; the sun disc was his symbol. He was the second most powerful deity, but was often wary of other gods supplanting him. His paranoia went to the extent of forbidding Nut from giving birth to deities that he feared would overthrow him. However, his scheme ended up being a tenuous one and Nut gave birth to major gods and goddesses, among whom was Isis, his wife and his fiercest rivalry.

Another rivalry was Apep (or Apophis), the god of chaos. He was Ra's arch-nemesis. He dwelled just below the horizon line and would swallow Ra every time he made his way to the Underworld. When he would swallow Ra, the sun would set and when he would completely devour him, night would come. Fortunately, he would fall by the wayside as he would always spit out Ra. This leads to sun rise.

Imentet and Ra from the tomb of Nefertari (1298-1235 BCE)

His consorts were Hathor, Isis and, in accordance with some accounts, Sekhmet and Bast.

According to certain cult-followers, Ra is viewed as the god who created the world and whose tears created men. He is also accredited for the formation of deities who were also his offspring—most were experiments of vengeance and protection against humanity. Sekhmet was the “eye of Ra”; Bast, the “cat of Ra”; and Hathor, the “eye of Ra.”

Many gods merged with Ra, among them were Atum (Atum-Ra or Ra-Atum) and Amun (Amun-Ra).

Nephthys

Nephthys was a goddess that ruled over the night, rivers, death, water, service, protection and mourning. Like her twin sister Isis she was linked to funerary rites. This was because of the role her and her sister had in protecting the mummies and Osiris. She was depicted as either a kite or a woman with outstretched falcon wings, signifying protection.

Nephthys was the wife of Seth, but her child Anubis is a mysterious subject. According to a myth, she was forbidden a child by Seth, so she contrived a plan in which she disguised herself as her sister Isis and seduced him. From this seduction was born Anubis. In fear of Seth learning of this mischief and later being driven to kill the child, Nephthys pleaded with Isis to adopt Anubis as her own son. This explains why, as the adopted son of Osiris, Anubis became the Underworld’s ruler but was never able to take Osiris’ position - as he wasn’t his real son.

Nut

The sister and consort of Geb, Nut was the mother of the major deities Nephthys, Isis, Osiris, and Seth. Her reign spanned over many realms; Nut was the Goddess of the sky, stars, the sun, light, the moon, astronomy, heaven, the universe, winds, and the air.

Nut personified the sun and the earth and was portrayed as either a nude women above the earth covered with stars or a cow.

Nut participated in saving Osiris and was thus seen as a friend of the dead. Upon his death Osiris pleaded: *"O my Mother Nut, stretch yourself over me, that I may be placed among the imperishable stars which are in you, and that I may not die."*

Nut was believed to welcome the deceased into her starry sky and nurture them:

"I am Nut, and I have come so that I may enfold and protect you from all things evil."

Anubis

Anubis (or Anpu) was the ruler of death, the Underworld and funerals. He mummified the corpse of the dead and protected tombs. Anubis was the child of Seth and Nephthys — who was never told of the secret of his fatherhood. Anubis was also the adopted child of Isis and Osiris.

Anubis attending the mummy of the deceased

There are sources that posit Ra and Hesat or Bast as the parents of Anubis. Plutarch (c. 40–120 AD) states that Anubis is the illegitimate son of Osiris and Nephthys.

In the statue of Hermanubis it reads:

"For when Isis found out that Osiris loved her sister and had sexual relations with her in mistaking her sister for herself, and when she saw a proof of it in the

form of a garland of clover that he had left to Nephthys - she was looking for a baby, because Nephthys abandoned it at once after it had been born for fear of Seth; and when Isis found the baby helped by the dogs which with great difficulties lead her there, she raised him and he became her guard and ally by the name of Anubis."

A jackal or a man with a head of a jackal was often the illustration of Anubis. His attributes included a flail, often held in his arm's crook, and a fetish.

His art of embalming was first practiced on the body of Osiris; he is accredited with the creation of the craft.

Bast

Bast (Bastet, Baast, Ubaste, or Baset) was the cat-headed goddess of love, protection, cats, warfare, music, joy and dance. She was the child of Isis and Ra.

Before the union of the two cultures of Egypt, Bast was Lower Egypt's warfare-goddess. Her counterpart in the opposite side Egypt was Sekhmet who was the warrior lioness deity of Upper Egypt. Although many deities merged after the union of Lower and Upper Egypt, these goddesses didn't follow suit. Bast transformed from a warrior lioness to a guardian deity during the 22nd Dynasty (c. 945–715 BC).

In the 1st millennium BC, Bast was depicted as a cat-faced woman. In her later depictions in the eleventh century BCE, she was portrayed as either a lioness or a cat-headed woman carrying sistrum (sacred rattle) and an aegis.

Bast was not only the daughter of Ra but also his experimental instrument of vengeance. She was the one who beheaded the god of chaos, Apophis, who was the arch-nemesis of Ra. Bast was styled the "Eye of Ra." According to a Myth, Ra sends her to the land of Nubia in disguise of a lioness.

Sekhmet

Sekhmet (or Sachmis) was the goddess of war, vengeance, medicine and fire. Her attributes were a sun disk, lioness and red linen. She was represented as either a large cat or a lioness; as a solar deity, she wore a solar disc and a Uraeus (a sacred serpent) which linked her to royalty and Wadjet.

To Egyptians she was the fiercest hunter whose breath instantaneously transformed land into a desert. She protected the pharaohs and spearheaded their wars.

She carried similar traits to the goddess Bast. They both had similar roles in Lower and Upper Egypt and both were the children and instruments of Ra. Sekhmet was “the Eye of Ra”, who was the fiercest weapon against the perils of humanity.

According to one myth, she was sent to finish the job Ra had sent Hathor to carry out—the eradication of the human race. Once she arrived, Sekhmet accidentally drunk beer thinking it was blood and ended up being too drunk to finish off the job of slaying humanity.

Amun

Amun was the god of the wind and the King of the deities (or Father of the deities). He and his wife Amaunet have been mentioned since the old Kingdom.

From the 11th to 16th century BC he rose to chief importance after his merge with the sun god Ra. He came to be known as Amun-Ra or Amen-Ra. The chief of all deities, Amun-Ra was the patron of the poor, the troubled and was the epicenter of personal piety.

Those who sought the help of Amun-Ra had to first confess their sins. The temple of Deir el-Medina reads: *"[Amun] who comes at the voice of the poor in distress, who gives breath to him who is wretched. You are Amun, the Lord of the silent, who comes at the voice of the poor; when I call to you in my distress. You come and rescue me...Though the servant was disposed to do evil, the Lord is disposed to forgive. The Lord of Thebes spends not a whole day in anger; His wrath passes in a moment; none remains. His breath comes back to us in mercy. May your ka be kind; may you forgive; It shall not happen again."*

Maat

Maat was the goddess of truth and justice. Her attributes were a feather and an ostrich. Maat was the daughter of Ra and according to some sources the consort of Thoth.

Her role in the creation and her indefatigable struggle to preclude the universe from collapsing into chaos was significant. In her later function, she handled the “weighing of the heart” (also called the “weighing of the souls”). This was carried out at Duat, in the Underworld. Her feather was the determiner of whether the souls of the dead would successfully reach the utopia of the next world.

The Weighing of the Heart from the Book of the Dead of Ani, Anubis weighs Ani's heart against the feather of Maat (1300 BC)

Often viewed as a female deity, Maat was in truth seen as the personification of the general principles of truth, justice, harmony, balance, morality and order; these were the ethics that every Egyptian had to follow. They were to act honorably and sincerely when dealing with matters of the community, family, god, the environment and their country.

CHAPTER III

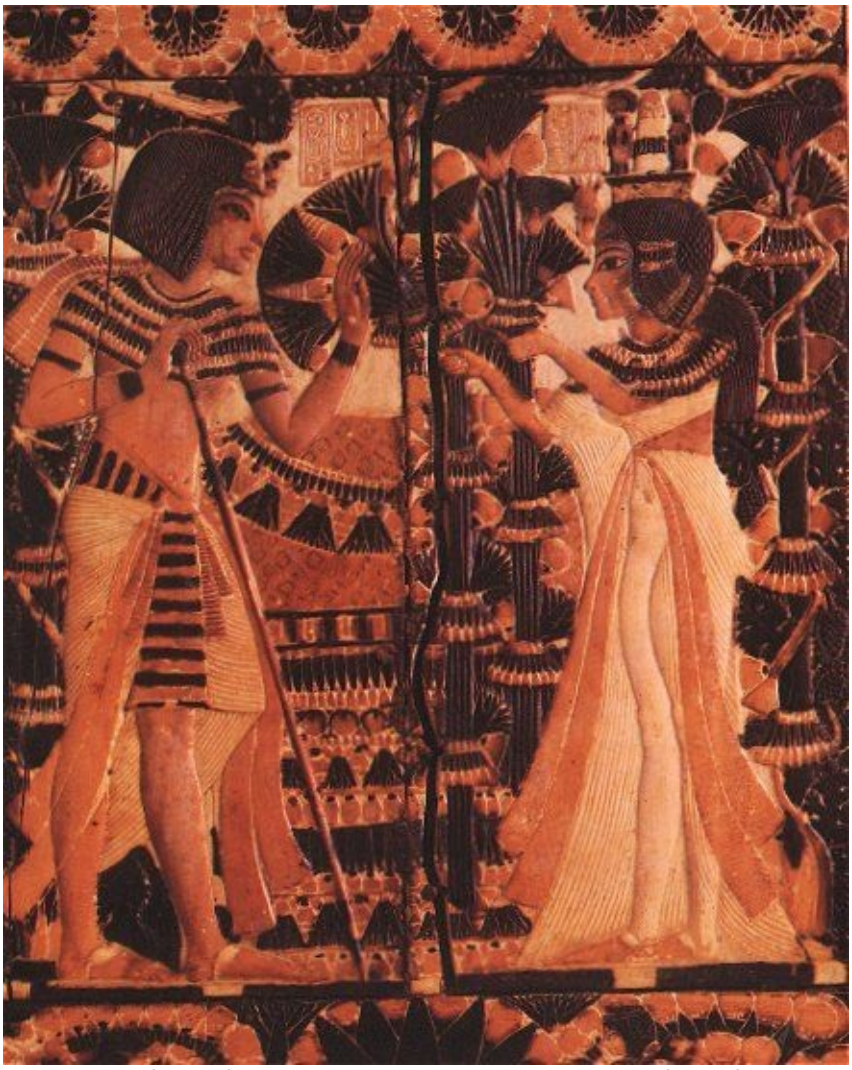
Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt

The Pharaoh in Egypt during the ancient times was the ruler of the people. They were given the titles “High Priest of Every Temple” and “Lord of the Two Lands.”

The first dynasties emerged in Egypt in 3000 BCE with the amalgamation of the Lower and Upper Egypt. These Pharaohs were considered gods on earth. After their demise, it was widely believed that they were to become the god of dead, Osiris. It was also the duty of the pharaohs to establish great monuments and temples in giving respect to the deities and in celebration of their success.

Tutankhamun

Tutankhamun (also called “King Tut” and Tutankhamen) is amongst the famous Egyptian Pharaoh 18th of the dynasty during the era of Egyptian history known as New Kingdom. The meaning of his name is “living image of [the god] Amun.” Tutankhamun is a widely recognized pharaoh today—much like a celebrity— when Howard Carter, an archaeologist, unearthed his tomb (in 1922 CE), which was almost intact in the Valley of the Kings. Though Tutankhamun was considered an insubordinate leader whose time of rule had hardly any influence, there was an about-face as more evidence started to emerge. At present, Tutankhamun is deemed to be an imperative figure that restored peace and order in a land where chaos was rife, and if it wasn’t for his untimely death, he would have unequivocally contributed a great deal to Egypt’s history.



Tutankhamun receives flowers from Ankhesenamun. This image is on the lid of a box found in Tut's tomb.

Early Life

Amenhotep IV (also called Akhenaten) was the father of Tutankhamun. Amenhotep's wife was Nefertiti (the step-mother of Tutankhamun). Tutankhamun's mother was Lady Kiya. She was one of the lesser wives of Amenhotep. Lady Kiya was not Nefertiti, although this is a common mistaken view. According to some suggestions, Amenhotep III and Tiye, his queen, were the parents of Tutankhamun, nevertheless this theory is refuted by most scholars.

Ankhesenpaaten, Akhenaten and Nefertiti's fourth daughter, was engaged to Tutankhamun during his childhood years. Ankhesenpaaten was Tutankhamun's

half-sister. Ankhesenpaaten was also thought to be older than he was, as she was wedded to her father previously (which she had a daughter from). Historian Margaret Bunsen argues that at the time when Tutankhamun ascended to the throne at the age of eight, Ankhesenpaaten was thirteen-years old. Tutankhamun's early life entailed the death of his mother. He had to then live with his step-mother, father, and half-siblings in the palace at Amarna.

Small royalty symbols (for instance the flail and crook) were found in Tutankhamun's tomb. It is probable that, during his childhood, he played with them— in preparation for future rule.

According to Egyptologist Zahi Hawass:

"A number of these [items] were inscribed with his birth name, demonstrating that he was crowned as Tutankhaten"

Reign

Following the death of his father, Tutankhamun ascended to the throne when he was just eight or nine-years old in 1338 or 1336 BC. Given his age, it was most probable that Tutankhamun was surrounded with very influential had advisors, most likely including the Vizier Ay and General Horemheb.

There was a temporary Pharaoh called Smenkhkare, between Amenhotep's death and Tutankhamun's ascension to the throne. Very little is known about this Pharaoh. As Smenkhkare's throne name matched that of Akhenaten's coregent, it was thought that Nefertiti was this pharaoh who reigned during the time Akhenaten's wellbeing may have been deteriorating and Tutankhamun was incapable of taking the position of a leader because he was still too young.

During his reign 1332–1323 BC, Tutankhamun restored balanced and made

several changes to the chaos Akhenaten put the nation into. Hawass writes:

"By the reign of Tutankhamun the situation in the Near East had changed drastically since the golden days of the Egyptian empire."

His restoration included establishing projects, particularly at Thebes and Karnak, where a temple was dedicated to Amun. Several monuments were built. The historian Barbra Watterson writes:

"*He was said to be a king who spent his life making images of the gods, and it was during his reign that work on the colonnade in Luxor Temple with its superb scenes of the Opet Festival, was undertaken*".

Tutankhamun, at just 16-years old, had to shoulder a great deal of responsibilities in mending the nation his father had devastated all alone. The young king, even with the assistance of the senior advisors who encircled him, learned his situation overwhelmingly. He, nevertheless, strived to redeem his nation's present condition from its past. Unfortunately, his abbreviated life (he died before reaching 20) was unable to show us what he might have accomplished in later years.

Tutankhamun's Death

Tutankhamun's death has remained the subject of considerable debate for centuries. There have been major studies carried out to figure out the grounds to his death. Early historians claim that he was murdered based on the damage of his skull. There are also speculations that Tutankhamun death was due to an untreated tooth, which was abscessed or from a fractured leg which had become infected. These theories, nevertheless, have also been refuted. According to another theory, Tutankhamun was not prone to a long life as he was as he was the outcome of incestuous union. Apologists of this theory cite Tutankhamun

and Ankhesenamun’s two stillborn children as physical proof of the practices of incest by the 18th Dynasty Egyptian pharaohs. The only thing that is known is that the recorded date of the death of Tutankhamun was in January 1327 BC and that his life was cut short by an accident.

Cleopatra VII

Cleopatra VII Philopator, simply called Cleopatra, was born in 69 BCE and ruled together with Ptolemy XII Auletes, her father. At the age of eighteen, she ascended to the throne after her father died. Since it was mandatory in the Egyptian tradition that a male consort was needed for a woman to rule, Ptolemy XIII, her 12-year old brother, was wedded to her. But soon after, she dropped the name of her brother from all official documentation and reigned alone. Cleopatra, unlike the other Ptolemy rulers who reigned for centuries in Egypt without knowing the language, had a great command over the Egyptian language and was articulate in Greek (her native language). She was also skilled in other languages. She therefore needed no help from translators to communicate with diplomats from other nations.

Historian Plutarch writes:

> "*It was a pleasure merely to hear the sound of her voice, with which, like an instrument of many strings, she could pass from one language to another; so that there were few of the barbarian nations that she answered by an interpreter.*"

Her prompt action in regards to decision making without her counselors created disgruntlement amongst some of the prominent officials. Pothinus, her head advisor, General Achillas, and Theodotus of Chios in 48 BCE dethroned her and made Ptolemy XIII the ruler, assuming he would be much controllable than Cleopatra. Cleopatra and Arsinoe (her half-sister) fled to Thebaid.

Pompey, Ptolemy and Caesar

Around the same period, Pompey the Great, the Roman politician and

general, was overpowered at the Battle of Pharsalus by Julius Caesar in the autumn of 48 BC. In seek of sanctuary, Pompey fled to Alexandria to get away from the forces of Caesar, however, what awaited him was much different. He was beheaded under the gaze of the young Ptolemy XIII— only thirteen-years old at that time— as well as his children and wife from the ship which he had just got off from. It is said to be that Ptolemy, who ordered Pompey's death, did it to curry favor with Caesar, therefore becoming Rome's ally, to which at that moment, Egypt was indebted to.

Upon his arrival in Egypt with his legions two days later, however, Caesar was infuriated when the head of Pompey was presented to him by Ptolemy. Even though Pompey was the political foe of Caesar, he was a consul of Rome and the widower of Julia, the only rightful daughter of Caesar who died during childbirth. Caesar announced he would govern by the army and established himself in the palace of the royals. Ptolemy XIII, with his court, escaped to Pelusium. However, Caesar was not going to permit the young leader to slip away and stir trouble, so he had him return back to Alexandria.

Caesar & Cleopatra's Relationship

For Cleopatra, this was the time to make use of the fury of Julius Caesar toward Ptolemy. Still in exile, Cleopatra knew the possibility of entering the palace without being pestered was slim. She therefore had herself covertly smuggled into the royal palace. This endeavor was made successful as she was rolled in a rug (supposedly a present for the general of Rome) to meet Caesar. They both seemed to develop instant attraction for each other. Caesar and Cleopatra were already in a relationship by the time Ptolemy XIII came to see Caesar the following morning. Ptolemy was fuming.

Cleopatra before Caesar, oil on canvas by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1866)

Nine months later, in June of 47 BCE, Cleopatra gave birth to Ptolemy Caesar (also called Caesarion, meaning “little Caesar”) and stated him publicly her successor.

Caesar deserted his objective to annex Egypt. To the contrary, he defended the claim of Cleopatra to the throne. The forces of Ptolemy were overpowered by Caesar at the Battle of the Nile, and in an attempt to escape after the battle, Ptolemy drowned in the Nile. The other leaders who were apart of the group in opposition to Cleopatra were also killed during the battle or afterwards.

Rome saw the return of Caesar in 46 BCE. Soon after his return, Caesar

brought Cleopatra and their son, together with her whole staff to reside there. He acknowledged publicly that Caesarion was his offspring, but not as his heir, as he chose Octavian, his grandnephew, instead. He also acknowledged Cleopatra as being his spouse, albeit he had a wife named Calpurnia Pisons at that time. This situation caused rage amongst the several senates and the public, for the rules of Rome against bigamy were firmly stuck to.

The assassination of Caesar took place on the 15th of March, 44 BC, while Cleopatra was still in Rome with her entire staff.

Mark Antony & Cleopatra

Following the assassination of Caesar, Cleopatra fled the country with her son and entourage to Alexandria. Mark Antony, the right-hand man of Caesar, together with Lepidus and Octavian were in pursuit of defeating the conspirators that were responsible for murdering Caesar. Following the Battle of Philipi, at which the armed forces of Octavian and Antony triumphed, Antony became the ruler of the provinces in the east, including Egypt, while the west was ruled by Octavian.

Antony and Cleopatra, by Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1885)

Cleopatra, in 41 BC, was summoned by Antony in Tarsus to give answers about her faithfulness. During the Roman war, allegedly, she paid considerable amount of cash to Cassius and Brutus. Cleopatra's flamboyant arrival charmed Antony.

Plutarch writes:

"She came sailing up the river Cydnus in a barge with gilded stern and outspread sails of purple, while oars of silver beat time to the music of flutes and fifes and harps. She herself lay all along, under a canopy of cloth of gold, dressed as Venus in a picture, and beautiful young boys, like painted Cupids, stood on each side to fan her. Her maids were dressed like Sea Nymphs and Graces, some steering at the rudder, some working at the ropes...perfumes diffused themselves from the vessel to the shore, which was covered with

multitudes, part following the galley up the river on either bank, part running out of the City to see the sight. The market place was quite emptied, and Antony at last was left alone sitting upon the tribunal while the word went, through all the multitude, that Venus was come to feast with Bacchus for the common good of Asia."

Cleopatra and Mark Antony became lovers right away and lasted together for ten years. Their offspring's were three. Cleopatra was also considered by Antony as his wife, although he was first wedded to Fulvia and then to Octavian's sister, Octavia. He divorced Octavia eventually to be wedded to Cleopatra legally.

Cleopatra's Death

Octavian and Antony's ailing relationship crumbled during these years that even a civil war was engendered. Both the armies of Cleopatra and Antony were overpowered in 31 BC, by the armed forces of Octavian at the Battle of Actium. They both ended their lives a year later. Antony, upon falsely hearing that Cleopatra died, stabbed himself with his sword and came to find out that she was alive after it was too late. Octavian permitted Antony to be taken to Cleopatra. It was in her arms that he died. The situation for Cleopatra was unfavorable and she understood that she would be taken to Rome as captive, mainly to embellish the victory of Octavian. Cleopatra knew there was no possible way that Octavian would be manipulated like Antony and Caesar, so she asked for some time to get ready. She was allowed the time that she demanded. It was then that Cleopatra managed to make a snake (conventionally an asp, although it is thought to be an Egyptian cobra by a large amount of scholars nowadays) bite her and poison her.

The Death of Cleopatra, by Reginald Arthur (1892)

Cleopatra’s son Caesarion was slaughtered after being captured by the orders of Octavian and her three children by Antony were raised by Octavia in Rome. This ended the lineage of the pharaohs in Egypt.

Ramses II

Ramses II (also known as: Ramesses II, Rameses, Ramses the Great and known as *Usermaatre'setepenre* by the Egyptian, meaning "*Keeper of Harmony and Balance, Strong in Right, Elect of Ra*", also called Ozymandias) was one of the Pharaohs (the third) of the 19th Dynasty. Ramesses lived till the age of 96. His concubines and wives in total exceeded 200 and had over 150 children. He outlived most of his children.

Early Life

The parents of Ramesses were Queen Tuya and Seti I. When he was 14-years old, he attended military campaigns with his father, including Palestine and Libya. Ramses was spearheading the campaigns he made himself in Nubia at the age of 22 with his two sons. He was named the co-ruler with Seti.

Ramses, with his father, planned big projects which included restorations and established a palace at Avaris. Ramses ascended to power following the death of his father in 1290 BC and without further ado, commenced military operation in an effort to reinstate Egypt's borders and to guarantee trade routes.

Literally hundreds of buildings, temples and monuments were built by Ramesses, including the two rock temples at Abu Simbel. It is considered by several historians that his reign is the peak of Egyptian art and culture.

Queen Nefertari

Ramesses' first wife and favorite queen was Nefertari. During the rule of Ramesses, several depictions of her appeared in statuary and temple walls. This was despite her rather early death (possibly during child birth).

Tomb wall depicting Nefertari (1298–1235 BCE) Ramses married Istnofret after Nefertari's death. And following the death of Istnofret, his daughters became his consorts. Be that as it may, he couldn't simply forget about his beloved wife Nefertari. He had her portrait carved on statuary and walls long after marrying other women.

Thutmose III

Thutmose III (also known as Tuthmosis III, Thothemes or Thutmosis) was the 6th king of the 18th Dynasty. He is often called “The Napoleon of Ancient Egypt.” Thutmose is often regarded as the best pharaoh ancient Egypt has ever seen. He was a national hero responsible for the golden age of ancient Egypt. Thutmose III ruled from 1479 BC to1425 BC.

Early Life

Thutmose III was the son of Thutmose II; his mother, Iset, was one of his father’s secondary wives. Given that there was no prince with a better claim to the throne, Thutmose was crowned king on the early death of his father in 1479 BC. He was, however, very young (only seven years-old) to rule at that time, so Hatshepsut (his father’s chief wife) ruled on her own while Thutmose III was gaining military training most of the time.

Thutmose III had several wives, which he had nine children from.

Military Campaigns

Amongst Thutmose III’s greatest achievement as a Pharaoh of Egypt were his military campaigns. He by and large initiated at least sixteen military campaigns including those in Syria, Palestine, Nubia and Mesopotamia.

According to historians, Thutmose III disliked his aunt and co-regent Hatshepsut. She was not a warrior and permitted neighbors of Egypt to believe they could liberate themselves from Egypt. His former years spent in the army made him an ingenious warrior who was valiant and not afraid to engage in battles. During his reign, he conquered approximately 350 cities and obtained

complete respect of Egypt and the entire region. In order to keep conquered leaders from raiding Egypt, Thutmose III required that they send their children to Egypt for their education. This very much deterred potential attacks.

Thutmose III's Tomb

It was in the Valley of the Kings, (one of the most sophisticated tombs) that Thutmose III was buried. Inside the tomb, only the wooden statues of the king and other gods, the red quartzite sarcophagus, pottery, bits of wooden model boats and the bones of animals were found. Even Thutmose III's mummy wasn't inside the tomb upon its discovery. He was buried at Deir el-Bahri, the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut. The condition of Thutmose III's mummy was bad when it was found. The ruler was short, not even five feet tall.

Mummified head of Thutmose III, by Grafton Elliot Smith (1912)

Akhenaten

Akhenaten (also called ‘Ikhnaton’, ‘Khuenaten’ or ‘Akhenaton’—they all mean “successful for” or “of great use to” the god Aten) was a pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty. After converting to the cult of Aten, he changed his name from Amenhotep IV (or Amenophis IV) to Akhenaten. It was during his reign that the empire began to crumble.

The youngest son of the Chief Queen Tiye and Amenhotep III, he was the consort of Queen Nefertiti and the father of Tutankhamun (by Lady Kiya) and Tutankhamen’s wife Ankhesenamun (by Nefertiti). As Amenhotep IV, his reign lasted for five years in which he respected the venerated traditions of the Egyptian religion and adhered to his father’s policies. However, in the fifth year of his reign, he made dramatic religious transformations. It began with his change of religion from the cult of Amun to that of Aten. For the following decade he pursued a campaign of establishing the superior religion of Aten in Egypt, becoming the first king to institute monotheism, and emaciated Egypt’s tradition of polytheism. He came to be infamously known as the ‘Heretic king.’

Foreign Policy

One unfortunate result of Akhenaten’s religious reforms was the neglect of foreign policy. According to the sources, other countries, former associates of Egypt, wrote several times to seek of Egypt’s assistance, but were elbowed aside by Akhenaten. The king simply made the choice to ignore what happens outside Egypt’s borders. He also gave little notice to affairs outside his palace at Akhetaten.

CHAPTER IV

Book of the Dead: Life, Death and Afterlife

There were a lot of beliefs in ancient Egypt and most of them revolved around life, death and the afterlife. And thanks to the historians and archeologists, who have shed their blood and sweat to unravel these mysteries, we are now able to understand the mindset and viewpoints of ancient Egyptians.

Book of the Dead spell 17 from the Papyrus of Ani (1275 BC)

Book of the Dead

Book of the Dead is, without a doubt, one of ancient Egypt's greatest relics. It was one of the earliest literary works to elaborately illustrate the nation's funerary traditions, the concept of life, death and the afterlife. But the practice of funerary writing in Egypt dates back to the Old Kingdom, in the 24th century B.C.

The first kinds of obituary writing in Egypt were Pyramid Texts, which were inscribed on the walls of burial chamber in pyramids. Pyramid texts, which included several figures representing humans and animals, were purposed to protect and help dead kings pass on to the afterlife safely. And the first of this kind of writing was used in the pyramid of King Unas, during the 24th century B.C.

Then during the reign of the Middle Kingdom, Pyramid texts evolved to what is called Coffin Texts. The contents of the Coffin Text had much similarity to that of the Pyramid Text. But there certainly were obvious discrepancies; one was that this new form of funerary text was inscribed on the interiors of a coffin, sometimes on Papyri or the walls of a tomb, but mostly on the surface of coffins; secondly, unlike the Pyramid Texts, which were used only by the royals and the elite; the Coffin Text was available for the commoners as well.

Then with the rise of the New kingdom around 1550 B.C., Egyptian writing and funerary tradition underwent yet another telling evolution, which was marked by the surfacing of the 'Book of the Dead.'

The Book of the Dead which is read as '*Reu nu pert emhru*' in Egyptian, and means 'The Chapters of coming forth by day' or 'Book of emerging forth into the Light' is an entity that highlighted the period of the New Kingdom. It was during this time that it developed and gained widespread recognition. Historians

say that it existed until the 1st century B.C.

The Book of the Dead is a funerary scripture aimed at facilitating an easy and safe navigation through the Duat (the Underworld) for the dead. It was also believed that this entity would enable the deceased to get help and protection from the Gods during this challenging journey.

It is basically a collection of spells, some were new but most of them were collected from the Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts. It was written on a papyrus commissioned by the individual before death or by a relative. The quality of the papyri and the texts differed tremendously, and it all depended upon the individual's financial standing.

Papyri were very expensive during that period and only the royals or the elite were able to afford it. There was even a point where archeologists discovered a Book of the Dead written on a second-hand papyrus.

The Book of the Dead, at certain occasions, would be written on linen shrouds, which would be used to wrap the dead bodies.

As earlier stated, the Book of the Dead is a compilation of magical spells written over the course of about one thousand years. The spells were written in the form of cursive hieroglyphs which were arranged in columns and separated by a black line. Each text, inscribed by a black or red ink, is accompanied by a certain kind of illustration.

There was a great amount of variety in the type of vignettes utilized in the Book of the Dead; some were extravagant, colorful, rich and large, whereas others were very simple and small, as in line drawings.

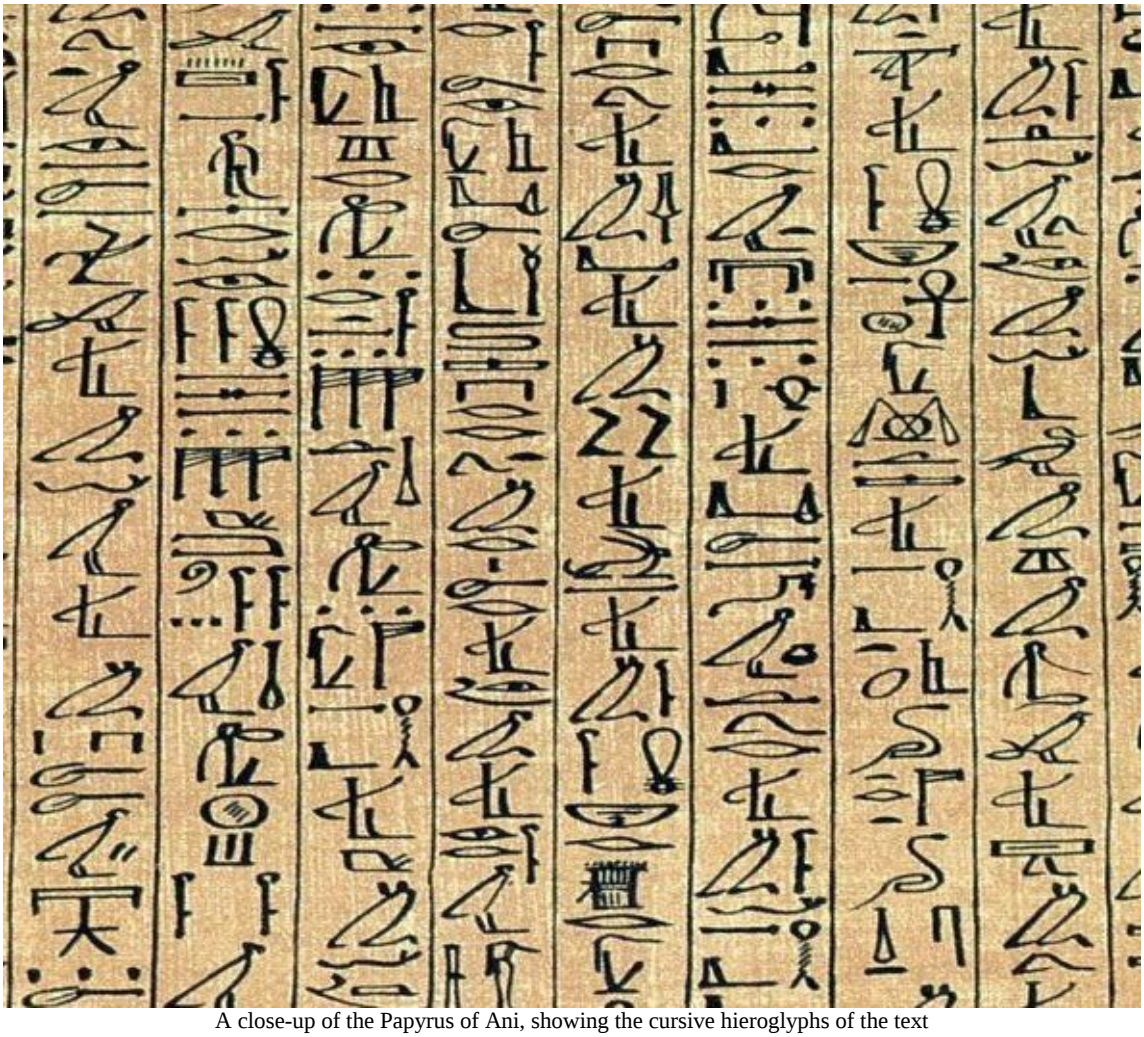
Often times, the illustrations included the image of the deceased's wife; but drawing of vicious lions, crocodiles, snakes, beetles and hippopotamus were also

quite common.

Each Book of the Dead was unique and different. There was no order or pattern in the way the chapters of the Book of the *Dead* were arranged. The illustrations, the texts, the spells were all developed in a way that’s to satisfy the preference of the deceased or their relatives.

So far about 192 spells used in ancient Egypt and in the Book of the Dead are known. But there isn’t a single Book of the Dead that contains all these spells, and if there is, it hasn’t yet been found then.

The greatest and most explicit relic of this funerary tradition that has survived for this long and still is in a good condition is The Papyrus of Ani – a legacy of ancient Egypt and one that is currently situated in The British Museum, London.



A close-up of the Papyrus of Ani, showing the cursive hieroglyphs of the text

Here are some of the translated spells historians and archeologists have managed to unravel.

“O you Soul [ba], greatly majestic, behold, I have come that I may see you; I open the Netherworld that I may see my father Osiris and drive away darkness, for I am beloved of him. I have come that I may see my father Osiris and that I may cut out the heart of Seth who has harmed my father Osiris. I have opened up every path which isin the sky and on earth, for I am the well-beloved son of my father Osiris. I am noble, I am a spirit [akh], I am equipped; O all you gods and all you spirits [akhu], prepare a path for me.”

— Spell 9 from the Papyrus of Ani

“All the evil which was on me has been removed.

What does that mean? It means that I was cleansed on the day of my birth in the two great and noble marshes which are in Heracleopolis on the day when the common folk make offerings to the Great God who is therein.

What are they? 'Eternity' is the name of one; 'sea' is the name of the other. They are the Lake of Natron and the Lake of Maat.

Otherwise said: ‘Eternity governs' is the name of one; 'Sea' is the name of the other.’

Otherwise said: ‘Seed of Eternity' is the name of one; 'sea' is the name of the other. As for that Great God who is therein, he is Ra himself’”

— Spell 17 from the Papyrus of Ani

If challenged by questions in the afterlife, this was used to demonstrate one’s acquaintance with religion and its secrets.

“*I have put my name in the Upper Egyptian shrine, I [have] made my name to be remembered in the Lower Egyptian shrine, on this night of counting the years and of numbering the months.”*

—Spell 25 from Book of the Dead.

It was used to help the deceased remember their names after death.

Life

No amount of fame or fortune can equate the worth of life; it is a priceless entity that could never be sold or exchanged. But life for ancient Egyptians was just a segment, a very small part of the eternal journey that awaited them after death.

Bunsen, the historian, argues that ancient Egyptians believed that human life, its goal and purpose, was to simply serve as a phase of life through which one could acquire eternal happiness offered in life after death.

But to accomplish a harmonious eternal journey one must live a good and just life here on earth.

Death

Death in Egyptian mythology doesn't quite necessarily mean the end. It is viewed as the moment when the soul parts from the body and is brought before Osiris in the "Hall of Truth" for the final judgment. The god Anubis is said to be the one who escorts the soul to Osiris.

However, before the soul stands to face Osiris and the final judgment, he or she must first pass through a series of gates and caverns that are infiltrated and guarded by mystical creatures that are vicious and will do whatever is possible to stop the passer-by. And to pacify these ferocious beings the deceased would use the spells in his or her Book of the Dead.

"Get back! Retreat! Get back, you dangerous one! Do not come against me, do not live by my magic; may I not have to tell this name of yours to the Great God who sent you; 'Messenger' is the name of one, and Bedty is the name of the other. The crocodile speaks: 'Your face belongs to righteousness. The sky encloses the stars, magic encloses its settlements, and my mouth encloses the magic which is in it. My teeth are a knife, my tusks are the Viper Mountain. The deceased replied: 'O you with a spine who would work your mouth against this magic of mine, no crocodile which lives by magic shall take it away"

—***Spell 31 used to stop the attack of crocodiles*** And if the deceased manages to circumvent all the obstacles and passes through all the challenges, then he/she will be escorted to the Hall of Truth.

In the Hall of Truth, the deceased would then be asked to swear that he/she did not commit the forty-two sins, which are also known as the "Negative Confession."

Here are some of the sins on the list:

1. I have not committed sin.
2. I have not committed robbery with violence.
3. I have not stolen.
4. I have not slain men and women.
5. I have not stolen grain.
6. I have not purloined offerings.
7. I have not stolen the property of the gods.
8. I have not uttered lies.
9. I have not carried away food.
10. I have not uttered curses.
11. I have not committed adultery.
12. I have made none to weep.

After reciting the Negative Confession before the forty-two judges, the heart, which is seen as the base of intelligence and memory, would then be put on a golden scale against the white feather of Maat or Ma'at and get weighed.

The deceased would be considered as someone who has lived a life free of sins and will be granted entrance to the afterlife, if the heart weighs lighter than the feather. But if the heart weighs heavier than the feather, then the soul of the deceased would be thrown to the Underworld where the merciless monster, Ammut, would devour it.

To avoid such calamity, ancient Egyptians would always take measures to protect and give the much needed strength to the deceased's heart. There were two common ways they would execute this ritual and one was done through magical spells like the kind depicted in Spell 125 or Spell 30B which reads, "*O my heart of my mother! O my heart of my mother! O my heart of my different forms! Do not stand up as a witness against me, do not be opposed to me in the*

tribunal, do not be hostile to me in the presence of the Keeper of the Balance, for you are my ka which was in my body, the protector who made my members hale. Go forth to the happy place where to we speed, do not make my name stink to the Entourage who make men. Do not tell lies about me in the present of the god. It is indeed well that you should hear!"

— Spell 30B

The other method ancient Egyptians commonly used for the protection of the deceased's heart was the burying of the body with heart shaped scarabs.

Afterlife

In Egyptian mythology the afterlife is a place of eternal bliss; the anxiously awaited paradise where only the gods and the pure would be able to live in. The illustration of the afterlife in Egyptian mythology is quite diverse, but most commonly it is imagined to be a rich and green place, where there were plenty waterways, crops, people, oxen and so forth.

The afterlife is often referred to as the ‘Field of Reeds’ in the Book of the Dead; it’s represented as a place that has much similarity to that of life on earth.

In the afterlife it is believed that the deceased will be able to join the Great Ennead (a group of gods) and his or her parents. It was also stated in various scriptures that once the deceased passes the judgment and enters the afterlife, he or she will not only join Osiris and all the other supreme Gods, but will also possess some kind of a divine power as well. This belief is illustrated by the way each Book of the Dead starts out as "The Osiris - [Name of the deceased].”

The Book of the Dead clearly depicts the marvelous aspects of the afterlife, but it also states that it was mandatory for the deceased to take part in a number of laborious chores. For this reason, the burial mounds would often have several statuettes with spells written on them; these objects were called Shabti or Ushebti.

CHAPTER V

Rituals and Sacrifices

As in many countries and cultures around the world in bygone days, Egypt also had rituals and believed in making sacrifices, human or otherwise.

Rituals

Ancient Egyptians preformed various kinds of rituals for various reasons; to maintain peace and order in the world, to protect the dead, to seek guidance, help and so forth. It’s no different than how the modern day society goes to church, synagogues, mosques, or temples to pray, praise or give out offerings.

Daily offering ceremonies in temples were one of the most commonly practiced rituals in ancient Egypt. Offering food, clothing, carvings, weapons, tools and so forth was a way of honoring and caring for the gods that have created them. These daily ritual were supervised by temple priests.

Private rituals, such as hymning or evoking mythical events, were also preformed, but these were often referred to as ‘magical’ and they were for the purpose of healing an illness or getting protection.

Breaking red pots after it’s been used for purification by water, was also a customary ritual. It was part of the funerary tradition, which was purposed to protect the dead from their enemies or evil spirits. These pots had inscriptions of the enemy’s name and breaking it symbolized their destruction.

“3 times half loaf offerings and reversion of offerings, 3 times removing the footprints and breaking of the red pots, once lay (down) the royal offering, wash, sit down by the offering, once libation water, incense fire, an offering which the king gives to the Osiris Ni-ankh-pepi”

— Rule of this ritual from the Unas-cemetery, Mastaba of Ni-anch-Pepi

Sacrifices

Blood sacrifice was regarded as the most supreme form of rituals in ancient Egypt. It seen as a very powerful way of appeasing the gods.

Initially, animals were the only creatures that were sacrificed. Bulls, for instance, were symbolized as the god Taurus, who had features of both human and animal. So sacrificing the bull was seen as a way of giving the gods a noble gift – a demigod.

Crocodiles were also commonly slaughtered, as they symbolized Seth at Edfu and Dendera.

Then with the course of time, Egyptians began to sacrifice humans. During human sacrificial ceremonies, the victims would first be treated and honored as gods before the killing. Historians believe that most of the sacrificial victims were criminals, rebels or prisoners of war.

According to the legends, criminals were sacrificed to appease the most powerful goddess in Egyptian mythology, Sekhmet, who was killed by a rebellious person.

BONUS CHAPTER

Ten Little Known Facts about Egyptian Mythology

Egyptians kept animals as pets

Animals in ancient Egypt were greatly valued. They were treated with respect and profound affection.

So many different kinds of animals were raised as cherished pets in almost every household in Egypt. Cats and dogs were the most domesticated, but people also raised hoopoes, falcons, vervet monkeys, doves, geese, even lions and Sudanese cheetahs.

Ancient Egyptians loved their pets; as evidence shows they mourned at their death and did whatever was possible to heal their illness.

Ancient Egyptians loved Board Games

With the progress of centuries a lot of things change. But the one thing that has never experienced even a slight wobble is how we entertain ourselves by way of playing games. It’s a long lived human tradition that even ancient Egyptians can attest to.

Egyptians loved playing board games. After a long day of work they would gather and play the ‘Mehen,’ ‘Dogs and Jackals’ or ‘Senet’ for hours. Even for the Pharaohs, board games were indispensable; Tutankhamen, for instance, was buried with several board games, and as several paintings show Queen Nefertari was also fond of playing Senet.

Painting in tomb of Egyptian Queen Nefertari (1295–1255 BC)

Pharaohs were often overweight

So many paintings illustrate the Pharaohs as slim and fit beings. But the truth about their figure is quite different.

There was no end or limit to the daily offerings in ancient Egypt. And one of the most commonly offered items was food. The majority of the society was vegetarian, but for the pharaohs the people brought meals such as beef, bread, fruit, honey, cake, wine and beer, which were certainly luxurious but decadent. And as the remains of their bodies show, they certainly ate well and gained quite a lot of excess fat.

Studies show that most of them were diabetic and suffered from vascular calcification. The mummy of Queen Hatshepsut serves as the perfect example.

The Pyramids were not built by slaves

The Pyramid is one of ancient Egypt’s greatest and most astonishing relics. What inspired its formation is one aspect that could pique anyone’s interest, but what’s more amazing is how it wasn’t constructed by slaves.

Pyramids of Giza, by David Roberts (1849) This majestic entity was actually built by skilled construction workers who weren’t exploited, but paid for their services.

Most of Ancient Egypt Remains Uncovered

As the world’s most historic destination, Egypt has attracted the attention of historians and archeologists who have certainly dedicated their time, knowledge and sweat to unravel her mysterious and colorful past. But it’s a huge country with a huge amount of desert sand.

Recently, archaeologists have found evidence that could lead them to yet another pyramid. And this one is believed to be 4,300 years old and harbors the remains of the mother of pharaohs. So it’s strongly believed that the world has yet to see more of ancient Egypt.

Women in Ancient Egypt

In ancient Egypt women were treated equally as men. In Egyptian mythology, goddesses were creators and protectors of the pharaohs; Ma’at, the goddess of balance and order; Nekhbet, the vulture goddess of Upper Egypt; Wadjet, the cobra goddess of Lower Egypt were but a few.

And so in society, women had equal - if not more - prominence as men. They had the liberty to participate in the economic, political and judicial arenas. They had the right to work, to divorce or remarry.

Pepi II: The Fly King

According to legends Pepi II was the Old Kingdom’s last pharaoh. He ruled for over sixty-four years after acceding to the throne at the tender age of six.

Pepi is often styled the “Fly King” and that was because he despised flies. And what’s interesting is how he would have naked slaves smeared in honey around him so as to keep the flies away.

Men Wore Makeup

Appearance is always something to care about. And in every generation women are known to be more self-conscious than men, but in ancient Egypt the men also worked equally as hard as women did on their appearance— yes, they wore makeup.

But they didn’t quite necessarily wear make up for vanity, it was simply because they believed that it had magical healing powers. They would often apply this make up, which was called Kohl, around the eyes using a sort of a liner made out of wood, ivory and bone.

The First Labor Strike in History

Ancient Egyptians were strong people who stood up for what they believed in. They loved and respected their pharaohs, but they weren't afraid to fight back when their rights were being violated.

During the ruling days of the New Kingdom, in the 12th century B.C., there was a delay of payment for the laborers working at Deir el-Medina. The workers then, angered by this action, decided to organize a strike – the first in history. They entered a mortuary temple and demonstrated a sit-down until their demands were met. It wasn't long before they ended up getting their deserved pay.

The Death of Tutankhamen

The young pharaoh, Tutankhamen, lived a very short life. He died at a young age and there is very little account of the kind of life he lived before his passing. Regarding how he died, however, recent studies seem to have an answer.

Scans of his mummy shows that Tutankhamen was buried without his heart and chest wall, which meant that he died of a terrible wound, as in the one caused by a vicious attack of a hippopotamus.

Legend has it that Egyptians loved hunting this creature and this young price was known for his love of hunting.